



THE SALVATION ARMY
INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENT

DOMESTIC ABUSE



STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army is opposed to domestic abuse and any worldview that normalises such attitudes or behaviour. Every instance of abuse or violence is contrary to God's plan for people and is unacceptable.

While domestic abuse can be experienced by all genders, women experience it at a higher rate. In some national and religious cultures, women are seen as inferior to men and abuse is subsequently perceived as acceptable, even normal. Children and youth who witness domestic violence, or are victims of abuse themselves, are at serious risk of developing long-term physical and mental health problems, and may be at greater risk of being violent in their future relationships.¹ It is for this reason that The Salvation Army affirms and commits to the care and protection of children.

Domestic abuse is often an act of power and control that exploits traditional gender roles, and manifests itself in violence and other forms of abuse. The Salvation Army wants to be an expression of God's gracious love and offers counsel or provision of humanitarian services where possible.

The Salvation Army is committed to standing with victims of domestic abuse and empowering a survivor's decision to pursue restoration, including seeking protection and separation from an abusive situation, and holding persons who abuse accountable.

The Salvation Army is committed to mutual respect and healthy relationships between people, and will speak against domestic abuse in all its forms.



¹ UN Study on Violence Against Children, <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/un-study-violence-against-children>

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Domestic abuse is a global public-health problem and a violation of human rights.² For the purpose of this statement, domestic abuse is defined as a single incident or pattern of behaviour in a relationship that is used to gain and maintain power and control over a family or household members. Abuse can occur within a range of relationships, including a current or previous intimate partner or a wider family setting, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, disability, socio-economic background, education level, caste or class.

There are many forms of domestic abuse that can occur, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic and spiritual abuse. Multiple forms of abuse can take place at the same time. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to, controlling and coercive behaviour, physical violence, using privilege in family decision-making processes, forced marriages and family 'in-law' relational abuse. Domestic abuse also includes behaviour that intentionally frightens, intimidates, manipulates, hurts, humiliates, blames, injures or wounds someone.

Domestic abuse manifests itself in every country, culture, religion, tribe and class. There are variances from culture to culture. In some countries, the patriarchal culture and associated attitudes are some of the most significant factors in domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can also be found both within and outside of the Church. Research suggests that incidence rates among churchgoers are similar to those in the general population.³

The effects of abuse are far-reaching and can damage the whole person, body, mind and spirit, and affects all relationships. Domestic abuse can have serious and fatal consequences for

victims and for those who see or hear the abuse. Healing from domestic abuse takes time.

Sometimes, people will stay in an abusive relationship because they feel powerless to leave. However, victims may remain in a domestic abuse situation for many reasons,⁴ including (but not limited to):

- fear
- denial
- shame
- bringing dishonour to the family
- lack of awareness that they are being abused
- lack of support and protection in the community
- a hope that things will improve
- an effort to maintain stability within the family
- financial insecurity if they leave
- subjective or unhelpful advice from others
- wanting to be faithful to their religious vows
- fulfilling cultural beliefs and practices
- misinterpretation of the Bible's instructions about family life.

In order for society to thrive, all people should have the right to feel safe within relationships and be recognised for who they are and what they bring to the world. This is particularly true for children who witness domestic abuse.

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

³ Aune, Kristin and Barnes, Rebecca, 'In Churches Too: Church Responses to Domestic Abuse – A Case Study of Cumbria', 2018, Coventry: Coventry University and Leicester: University of Leicester

⁴ *Let's Talk About Partner Abuse*, internal training document, Salvation Army IHQ

GROUND S FOR THE POSITION OF THE SALVATION ARMY

The Bible makes it clear that all people are equally created in the image of God and have inherent worth and dignity (Genesis 1:27). It also offers a positive model for healthy relationships, characterised by self-sacrificing love (Philippians 2:5-8) and the flourishing of life (John 10:10), where each member of the human family is equally valued and respected (1 John 3:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

As God's people, our attitudes and behaviour towards others should be a reflection of who Jesus is (Philippians 2:5-8). Alongside this, Christians are called to mirror the actions and teachings of Jesus in all their relationships, demonstrating compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12-15), and to love one another (1 John 3:23). Anything that may devalue, defile or damage a relationship through abusive attitudes and behaviours is completely unacceptable.⁵ The Bible encourages all people to live in harmony and peace together (Romans 12:16,18). People who engage in

domestic abuse are not displaying the fruit of the Spirit but rather the acts of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-25).

God cares deeply for those who suffer abuse and exploitation at the hands of others (Psalm 9:8-9). This can be seen in the stories of Hagar (Genesis 16), Tamar (2 Samuel 13) and Mordecai (Esther 5), and in the way Jesus treated people, especially women (John 4:1-26, Matthew 9:18-30). God never takes delight in abuse, and no faithful interpretation of Scripture can tolerate or justify any form of abuse (Psalm 10:14-18).

Every vulnerable person who encountered Jesus was offered a safe space, respect and compassion (Mark 14:6-9). Followers of Jesus are called to care for those who are affected by domestic abuse, to seek to bring healing to those who experience it (Isaiah 1:17), to speak out against domestic abuse, and to interrupt the injustices and harm of domestic abuse (Proverbs 31:8-9; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3).



⁵ *Called to be a Soldier: Exploring the Soldier's Covenant*, p40, 2020, Salvation Books

PRACTICAL RESPONSES

1. Salvationists are encouraged to prevent domestic abuse in their own families, churches and communities, providing a living example of healthy relationships.
2. Where any child is abused or witnesses abuse, The Salvation Army commits to acting in line with our *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies*⁶ and will advocate and support children impacted by domestic abuse wherever possible.
3. The Salvation Army commits to listening to and learning from survivors of domestic abuse, especially when speaking out against domestic abuse.
4. The Salvation Army corps and centres strive and actively seek to prevent domestic abuse and ensure people are safe within all its ministry activities.
5. Where possible, The Salvation Army will deliver training and teaching on domestic abuse, its effects and how to prevent it.⁷
6. Salvationists are encouraged to respect and support any legal action that survivors of domestic abuse may wish to take in support of themselves or to separate themselves from abuse.
7. Salvationists commit to praying for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
8. Salvation Army leaders can influence cultural beliefs and practices in many parts of the world and should be advocates of domestic abuse prevention.
9. The Salvation Army supports innovative responses to domestic abuse that promote healthy relationships, increase safety for survivors and create lasting change. Faith-based facilitated conversations are strongly encouraged.
10. The Salvation Army is well placed to stop the generational cycle of domestic abuse by encouraging sensitive discussion and providing support to young people.

⁶ Each Salvation Army territory and region is required to have a Child Protection Policy.

⁷ Faith-based facilitation would be a useful process here – see *Building Deeper Relationships Using Faith-based Facilitation*, 2010, The Salvation Army IHQ, <https://www.salvationarmy.org/fbf>





RESOURCES

Building Deeper Relationships Using Faith-based Facilitation

2010, The Salvation Army IHQ
www.salvationarmy.org/fbf

Called to be a Soldier: Exploring the Soldier's Covenant

2020, Salvation Books
https://issuu.com/salvos/docs/called_to_be_a_soldier

Human Rights & The Salvation Army: Reflecting on the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

2018, Salvation Books
<https://sar.my/hr70>

IHQ Child Protection Policy Framework

2017, The Salvation Army IHQ
https://issuu.com/salvationarmyihq/docs/final_child_protection_policy_frame

The Salvation Army: International Positional Statement: Sexism

<https://www.salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips>

The Salvation Army: International Positional Statement: The Use of Power

<https://www.salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

UN Study on Violence Against Children

<https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/un-study-violence-against-children>

Approved by the General, June 2024

The views expressed in this international positional statement constitute the official position of The Salvation Army on the issue addressed, and they may not be modified or adapted in any way without the express written permission of International Headquarters.

